

The illustration depicts five women in traditional Ottoman attire within a garden setting. On the left, a woman in a light pink robe with gold trim and a white headscarf stands with her hands clasped. Behind her, another woman in a red robe and a patterned headscarf is partially visible. To the right, a woman in a dark brown robe and a yellow headscarf is kneeling, holding a long, thin object, possibly a stringed instrument or a tool. In the foreground, a woman in a yellow robe is kneeling and holding a large, brown, textured object, possibly a cushion or a piece of fabric. The background features several trees with pink blossoms and a blue sky. The overall style is reminiscent of traditional Ottoman miniature painting.

RUTH MILLER

TWENTY-FIVE WOMEN WHO SHAPED THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

ROUTLEDGE



TWENTY-FIVE WOMEN WHO SHAPED THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Twenty-Five Women Who Shaped the Ottoman Empire is a tale of how women's triumphs as well as their failures shaped a global society—not despite, but because of, gender.

The Ottoman Empire was among the longest-lived polities in history, stretching between the thirteenth and twentieth centuries across three continents, several seas, and scores of cities, deserts, mountain ranges, rivers, and forests. This volume provides a compendium of idiosyncratic life stories and explores how women from these eras and regions understood the shape of the world in which they lived, and how they brought their consciousness of their gender to their efforts to re-shape it.

Among the questions explored in the book are how women have negotiated and constructed the public and private spheres, how to define “women’s speech” in a world mediated by men and male-dominated genres and institutions, and how women experienced their bodies as sites of politically inflected reproduction, death, and decay.

The book is thus an accessibly offbeat feminist overview of the field of Ottoman History that provides students, scholars, general readers, and non-specialists with insights into the lives and work of both ordinary Ottoman women and celebrated Ottoman women, women who failed despite their best efforts and women who succeeded against all odds—suicides, spies, and murderers as well as queens, scientists, and poets.

Ruth Miller is Professor Emerita of History at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Her publications include *The Biopolitics of Embryos and Alphabets: A Reproductive History of the Nonhuman* (2017) and *The Limits of Bodily Integrity: Abortion, Adultery, and Rape Legislation in Comparative Perspective* (2007).

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Ruth Miller

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Note on Transliteration, Names, and Pronunciation</i>	<i>xiii</i>

Introduction: A Different Shape	1
---------------------------------	---

PART I

The Beginning: Prophecy and Poetry **31**

1 Malhun Hatun (d. 1323): Mother of the Dynasty	33
2 Mihri Hatun (1460–1515): Distinguished Court Poet	47
3 Zeynep Hatun (Fifteenth Century): Elusive Touchstone of the Poet Biographers	61
4 A'isha al-Ba'uniyya (d. 1517): Mystic, Mufti, and Spiritual Model	73

PART II

**A Global Empire: Networks of Influence,
Webs of Power, and “The Sultanate of Women” 85**

- 5 Hürrem Sultan (1502–1558): Roxelana,
the Queen and the Witch 87
- 6 Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi (1510–1569):
Heroine of the Inquisition 102
- 7 Nurbanu Sultan (1525–1583): Architect of
an Unprecedented Charitable Foundation 116
- 8 Şakire Hatun (ca. 1570s): Plaintiff and
“Warrior” 132
- 9 Elizabeth Báthory (1560–1614): The
Bloody Countess 146
- 10 Gülnuş Sultan (1642–1715): The Huntress
Who Ushered in the Tulip Period 163

PART III

**The Ottoman Baroque: Art, Revolution,
and Orientalism in the Long Eighteenth Century 179**

- 11 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
(1689–1762): Errant Embodiment of the
European Enlightenment 181
- 12 Dilhayat Kalfa (1710–1780): Celebrated
Composer 198
- 13 Laskarina Bouboulina (1771–1825):
Champion of the Greek Revolution 209

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 14 | Esma İbret Hanım (b. 1780): Master Calligrapher | 223 |
| 15 | Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (1819–1881): Orientalist Painter | 241 |

PART IV

**The Age of National Consciousness:
Feminist Witnessing and Feminist Disruption** **257**

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 16 | Maryana Marrash (1848–1919): Muse, Poet, and Essayist | 259 |
| 17 | Fatma Aliye (1862–1936): New Woman and Novelist | 273 |
| 18 | Zabel Yesayan (1878–1943): Genre-Defining Witness to the Armenian Genocide | 289 |
| 19 | Huda Sha'arawi (1879–1947): Charismatic Founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union | 303 |
| 20 | Celile Hikmet (1880–1956): Subversive Modernist Painter | 321 |
| 21 | Halide Edip (1884–1964): The Turkish Republic's Foremost Feminist | 335 |

PART V

The End: Making Things Fall Apart **349**

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 22 | Sarah Aaronsohn (1890–1917): A Spy in the Levant | 351 |
|----|--|-----|

viii Contents

23	Anastasia Golovina (1850–1933) and Safiye Ali (1894–1952): Medical Practitioners Across Borders	365
24	Sabiha Sertel (1895–1968): Dissident Publishing Phenomenon	380
25	Sabiha Gökçen (1913–2001): The World’s First Female Fighter Pilot	396
	Conclusion: The Lingering Shadow of Osman’s Tree	409
	<i>Glossary</i>	415
	<i>Index</i>	418

FIGURES

0.1	Sultan Beyazıt I before Timur, from an <i>Akbarnama</i> (“Book of Akbar”) by Dharam Das, ca. 1600	3
0.2	The Ottoman Empire in 1683	5
1.1	A lion brought from Baghdad submits to Osman Gazi by licking his boot, indicating Ottoman dominion over the animal as well as human world, from the <i>Hünernâme</i> , or “Book of Accomplishment,” ca. 1584	34
1.2	Commemorative Statue of Malhun Hatun in the Turkish city of Eskişehir	37
2.1	Sultan Mehmet III (r. 1595–1603) entertained by three musicians and two jesters, as the poet Nadiri is introduced to him as a potential beneficiary of his patronage, from the illustrated <i>Divan</i> of the poet Nadiri, ca. 1605	50
2.2	The poet-biographer Latifi, who described Mihri Hatun as “coquettish” like a woman yet “burning with passion” like a man, from his own illustrated biographical dictionary, ca. 1540s	55
3.1	Pages from the biographical dictionary of the poet-biographer Aşık Çelebi, ca. 1568	63
3.2	Züleyha rips Yusuf’s shirt, from Kemaleddin Behzad’s Persian “The Seduction of Yusuf,” ca. 1488	67

x Figures

4.1	The severed head of the defeated Mamluk Sultan, who had recently met with A'isha al-Ba'uniyya, is presented to the Ottoman Sultan Selim I, from the <i>Hünernâme</i> , or “Book of Accomplishment,” ca. 1584	76
5.1	Haseki Sultan Complex Plan, excluding the hospital, by Cornelius Gurlitt, 1912	93
6.1	<i>A Young Woman and Her Little Boy</i> , presumed portrait of Beatriz de Luna by Agnolo Bronzino, ca. 1540s	104
7.1	Sultan Süleyman welcoming Hayrettin Pasha back from his Venetian expedition, from the <i>Süleymannâme</i> , or “Book of Süleyman,” ca. 1558	117
7.2	Women and men in the street watching Nurbanu Sultan's funeral ceremony, from the <i>Şehinşehname</i> , or “Book of King of Kings,” ca. 1597	123
9.1	Presumed posthumous portrait of Elizabeth Báthory wearing mixed Western European and traditional Hungarian garb, early 1600s	151
9.2	Engraving of the torture and execution of French and Walloon mercenaries in 1600 at Pápa castle by Georgius Houfnaglius, 1617	154
10.1	The highly decorative northeast fountain of Gülnuş Sultan's New Valide Sultan Mosque Complex in Üsküdar, Istanbul, begun 1708	168
11.1	Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in “Turkish” garb with her son, Edward Wortley Montagu, by Jean Baptiste Vanmour, 1717	182
11.2	Alexander Pope declares his love to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu by William Powell Frith, 1852	190
12.1	Early-eighteenth-century female musicians, from the <i>Surname-i Vehbi</i> , or the “Festival Book” of the court poet, Vehbi, ca. 1720	202
13.1	Laskarina Bouboulina on the Greek one drachma coin, 1990	210
13.2	<i>Bouboulina Attacking Nafplio</i> , Anonymous, early nineteenth century	215

14.1	<i>Hilye</i> in free form by Esma İbret Hanım, 1794/1795	231
15.1	Mermaid by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann, 1863, before her Orientalist turn	249
15.2	Odalisque by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann, 1869	249
15.3	Mermaid (<i>The Siren</i>) by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann, 1873, after her Orientalist turn	250
16.1	Photograph of Maryana Marrash, before 1913	260
17.1	Fatma Aliye Topuz on the 50 lira Turkish banknote, 2009	276
17.2	Cover of <i>Debt of Hate</i> by Georges Ohnet in <i>Le Radical</i> , 1891	278
18.1	Zabel Yesayan as a young woman	290
18.2	Displaced Armenian families in the courtyard of the German-Levant Cotton Company following the 1909 Adana massacres, 1909	292
18.3	Zabel Yesayan with her family and the Armenian flag in Paris, 1918	294
19.1	Huda Sha'arawi in her office, ca. 1900s	304
19.2	Huda Sha'arawi with Talaat Harb, founder of Banque Misr, 1933	313
20.1	<i>Hamamda Nü</i> ("Nude in the Bath") by Celile Hikmet, 1940	327
20.2	Portrait of Nazım Hikmet by Celile Hikmet, 1944	330
21.1	Halide Edip as a young woman	336
22.1	Sarah Aaronsohn and Avshalom Feinberg, leaders of the NILI spy network, 1916	353
23.1	Anastasia Golovina with fellow activists Zahari Stoyanov, Dimitar Rizov, and Aleksandar Golovin, 1885	368
23.2	Safiye Ali between the Balkan Wars and the First World War wearing a medal of the Ottoman Mecidiye Order	371
24.1	Sabiha Sertel defending herself at her trial, 1946	385
24.2	A page from <i>Tan</i> ("Dawn"), a struggling newspaper purchased by the Sertels in 1936 and transformed into the second largest newspaper in Turkey	389

xii Figures

25.1	Sabiha Gökçen and her fellow pilots posing with bombs in front of her Breguet 19, 1937	398
25.2	Women and children displaced following the Dersim Campaign, 1938	400
26.1	Tuğra of Mehmet IV, ca. 1662	410

NOTE ON transliteration, NAMES, AND PRONUNCIATION

Several options are available for transliterating Arabic, Ottoman-Turkish, and Persian words into Latin script. In this book, Ottoman-Turkish words are transliterated into modern Turkish forms (“Mehmet” rather than “Mehmed”), whereas Arabic and Persian words are transliterated following the guidelines listed in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. As much as possible, I have also used English versions of words that have come into general English usage (“Pasha,” for example, rather than “Paşa”). Finally, for those words that may be more familiar to a general audience in their Arabic formulation than in their Turkish formulation, I have used the Arabic transliteration (“*waqf*” for “foundation,” rather than “*vakıf*”).

The names that appear over the following pages conform to the practices current at the time of each biographical subject’s life. Surnames came into use, for example, in 1934 in post-Ottoman Turkey. For the purposes of this collection, therefore, Halide Edip Adıvar is “Halide Edip” rather than “Adıvar.” Anastasia Golovina, contrarily, is “Golovina,” and Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann is “Jerichau-Baumann.” For a list of titles, please see the glossary.

Ottoman and post-Ottoman place names are notoriously political. Here, I have used common city names in their contemporary English forms, hence “Istanbul” rather than “Constantinople” or “Dersaadet,” “Salonica” rather than “Thessaloniki” or “Selanik,” and “Izmir” rather than “Smyrna,” but also “Nafplio” rather than “Nauplion.” When I’ve believed it would help more than hinder understanding, I have used modern regional place names to refer

xiv Note On Transliteration, Names, And Pronunciation

to historical areas (“Bulgaria,” for something that extends further north than “Thrace”). In general, I have added the qualifier “what is contemporary” (that is, “what is contemporary Bulgaria” or “what is contemporary Egypt”), but even this qualifier may be insufficiently apolitical. When I was faced with a history of border-drawing too complex to address in a short biography, I took refuge in geological formations (“The Carpathians” rather than “Romania” or “Slovakia”).

Letters in modern Turkish are pronounced as follows:

- a** a as in all
- c** j as in joke
- ç** ch as in chimney
- e** e as in set
- ğ** unvocalized
- i** ee as in teen
- ı** io as in revolution
- o** o as in over
- ö** French eu, as in *lieux*
- ş** sh as in shiny
- u** oo as in hoot
- ü** French u, as in *plume*

INTRODUCTION

A Different Shape

Spanning seven centuries and three continents, the Ottoman Empire was one of the most ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse polities in the world's history. As such, its shape has always posed a problem. How can the shape of the diverse *memalik-i mahruse*, the "well-protected domains," invoked by self-referential sixteenth-century sultans,¹ be the same as the unitary "Turkey" across which nineteenth-century European diplomats sought to extend colonial economic and extraterritorial privileges?² How can a single shape incorporate both the Balkans and Yemen, both the Caucasus and Algeria, along with the populations inhabiting those regions? And how can twenty-five (or even twenty-six) women from lands as far flung as these, from times as disparate as the thirteenth century and the twentieth century, have participated in shaping this object?

One quick series of answers to these questions is: it isn't; it can't; and they haven't. The shapes and spaces invoked by the questions above operate in discrete frameworks. The well-protected domains reference the shape of an empire founded on a prophetic dream of global rule.³ Modern extraterritoriality rights emerge from the speciously rational cartographic shape underlying colonial taxonomies.⁴ And the twenty-five women who populate this volume, separated by time, space, religion, ethnicity, language, class, profession, and culture, shape a gendered agency stretched thin across centuries and continents.

The Ottoman Empire, in these questions, is multiple: a shape dreamt, protected, dominated, colonized, mapped, projected,

2 Twenty-Five Women Who Shaped the Ottoman Empire

imagined, mobilized, and, as we shall see later, turned monumental, left war-torn, given over to violence, and made abject, before disappearing altogether. These spaces and shapes do not coincide with one another. Frequently they obliterate one another. And yet, all emerged in whole or in part as a product of women's shaping.

How did this happen? A useful place to begin to answer that question is with a brief geopolitical history of the Empire. Sometime near the end of the 1200s, following the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate under the Mongols in 1258, a quasi-nomadic Turkic leader settled his warriors and clients in the northwestern corner of Anatolia. This Turkic leader's name was Osman, "Othman" or "Uthman" in classical Arabic pronunciation, hence "Otman" in German or Latin, and thence "Ottoman" in the western European historical record.

For reasons that differ according to commentators' contemporary political commitments (even "nomadic" and "warrior" are contested descriptors),⁵ Osman amassed a following and began to push the edges of his territory outward. In 1326, Osman's son, Orhan, captured the Anatolian city of Bursa, which became the first Ottoman capital.⁶ By the end of Orhan's reign, most of northwestern Anatolia was Ottoman. Under Orhan's son, Murat, contemporary Bulgaria and Serbia had been largely incorporated into the Ottoman state. Edirne or Adrianople, later the second Ottoman capital city, fell in 1361.⁷

After that, subsequent to a setback and a series of civil wars when Timur, "Tamerlane" in the European record, captured the Sultan Beyazıt I in 1402 and, according to the chroniclers, provoked the latter's suicide,⁸ the fifteenth century was a period of rapid expansion: Constantinople/Istanbul became Ottoman in 1453, followed by the remainder of the Byzantine Empire. The Balkans, including what are contemporary Albania and Greece, fell by the 1480s. By the turn of the fifteenth century, contemporary European chroniclers were describing the Sultan Mehmet II as a man obsessed by cartography and maps because only maps could satisfy his "desire to dominate."⁹ The conquest of Crimea, and then, one hundred years later, the Caucasus, turned the Black Sea into what nineteenth-century diplomatic historians liked to call "an Ottoman lake."¹⁰



FIGURE 0.1 Sultan Beyazıt I before Timur, from an *Akbarnama* (“Book of Akbar”) by Dharam Das, ca. 1600.

Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1935.

4 Twenty-Five Women Who Shaped the Ottoman Empire

And then, in 1516 and 1517, after absorbing the former Mamluk state, including what are contemporary Egypt and Syria and the western part of the Arabian peninsula into Ottoman territory, the Sultan Selim I took on the title of Caliph and Protector of the Holy Places, Mecca and Medina.¹¹ Throughout the remainder of the sixteenth century, much of north Africa, most of the Arabian peninsula, and many of the islands of the eastern Mediterranean became Ottoman. The region that is now Iraq changed hands between the Ottomans and the Iranian Safavids throughout the 1570s and 1580s, gradually becoming predominantly Ottoman by the 1590s.¹² Today's Hungary and Romania were Ottoman by the end of the sixteenth century.

The year 1699 ordinarily marks the beginning of the Ottoman withdrawal from central and southeastern Europe, though those same eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diplomatic historians frequently and romantically invoke 1683, the year of the disastrous second siege of Vienna, as the turning point in Ottoman territorial fortunes.¹³ By the early eighteenth century, Hungary had been ceded to the Hapsburg state, and by the late eighteenth century most of the eastern and northern Black Sea was Russian. In 1832, following a decade-long war of independence, Greece became sovereign. In 1878, Serbia and Romania likewise established their autonomy.

Throughout the later nineteenth century, British and French imperial actors began to establish formal as well as informal, legal as well as quasi-legal, colonies in Asian and African territory that remained nominally Ottoman until the First World War. Algeria, for example, became a formal French colony in 1848, whereas Syria and Lebanon were subject to French "humanitarian intervention" by 1860 and 1861.¹⁴ Egypt became a British protectorate gradually between 1882 and 1914 via a series of open-ended, temporary states of emergency that lasted nearly 70 years,¹⁵ whereas much of Iraq was ruled *de facto* by British consular officials rather than Ottoman governors over the same period.¹⁶ In the decade and a half preceding the First World War, Bulgaria and Albania became formally independent, Austria annexed Bosnia, and Italy annexed Libya.

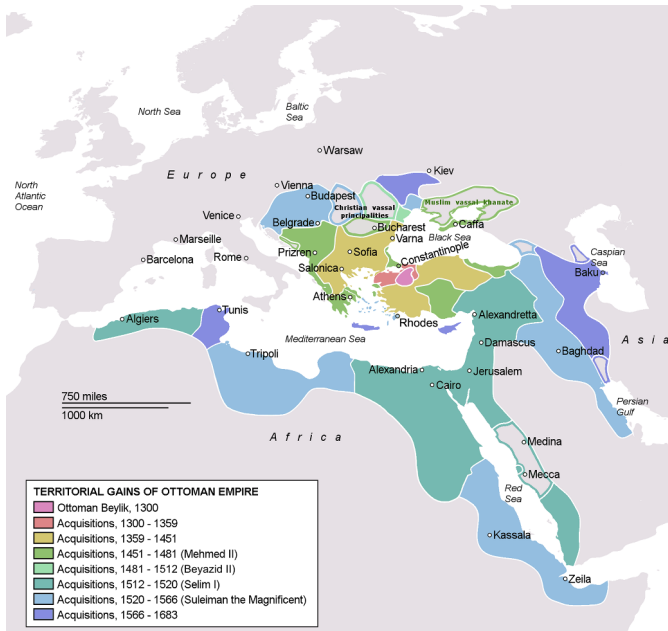


FIGURE 0.2 The Ottoman Empire in 1683.

Source: map by Atılım Güneş Baydın.

The Treaty of Sèvres, which formalized the Ottoman defeat following the First World War and established British and French mandates in most of the Arabic-speaking former Ottoman territories, reduced the Ottoman state to a small area surrounding the city of Ankara. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, marked the end of the Ottoman Empire and established the Republic of Turkey within today's Turkish borders. By 1924, the Ottoman Caliphate had been abolished.¹⁷

This geopolitical and military history of the Ottoman polity has, however, little to do with the lives of the women who appear throughout the following pages. If anything, it serves as a foil to the less certain shapes and spaces that would have been familiar or

6 Twenty-Five Women Who Shaped the Ottoman Empire

significant to them. Indeed, the naïve assumption underlying this conventional tale of borders expanding and borders contracting—that the Ottoman Empire was a cleanly delimited entity characterized by clearcut distinctions between interior and exterior, between compatriot and foreigner, between the abode of justice and the abode of war—is one of many that the biographies constituting this compendium will question.

Consider just one of the more obvious conclusions to draw from this schematic history: the Ottoman Empire, one of the longest-lived Islamic polities in history, was geographically European before it was Asian or African. Moreover, since Ottoman jurists, administrators, and rulers had little interest in converting the non-Muslim peoples inhabiting the Empire's European territories to Islam, it was also, for its first two hundred years, a significantly Christian-populated state. Only Bosnia and Albania can boast significant indigenous Balkan-Muslim populations today.¹⁸

It would be an error, however, to attribute this Ottoman openness to non-Muslim belief and practice to an anachronistic celebration of religious diversity for its own sake. On the contrary, non-Muslims were tolerated and protected within Ottoman imperial borders only because Ottoman imperial actors were working within a pre-modern Islamic political and legal tradition that incorporated non-Muslim populations into the ideal Islamic state as both tolerated or protected subjects *and* inferior subjects.¹⁹ Harmonious inequality was the touchstone of the system. Inferiority made the system of tolerance possible.

Additionally, the most significant early modern Ottoman contribution to this centuries-old practice of religious and cultural tolerance was not to reconfigure it into the foundation for a modern proto-democratic system of equal citizenship. Rather, it was to institutionalize its inherent inequality via an elaborate edifice of tax structures, consumption regulations, and surveilled legal autonomy in a bureaucratic arrangement called the *millet* system that many argue was fully formalized only by the nineteenth century.²⁰ Non-Muslims lived within Ottoman lands, in theory if not always in actuality,²¹ according to their own laws, worshipped according to their own practices, and refined Ottoman variants on their own languages and cultures, while

being denied the political, sartorial, and economic freedoms enjoyed by their Muslim counterparts.²²

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the same Ottoman administrators who had governed this just, yet inequitable, early-modern system of religious, linguistic, legal, cultural, and ethnic diversity were thus faced with a dilemma: upon attempting to institute the nascent liberal-democratic ideals of the day by replacing the fluid and informal *millet* system with a modern, formal system of uniform Ottoman citizenship defined by equality before a single law, the demands for continued “flexibility” on the part of the tolerated yet unequal subjects who would become equal citizens came from every walk of life, from every religious, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic background.²³ Never having served a politics of starkly defined interior and exterior, of not-foreign and foreign, or of legal uniformity, be it religious, ethnic, linguistic, or political, Ottoman institutions simply weren’t up to the challenge. There was no room in Ottoman political theory or practice for a replacement of the communal and frequently local belonging that had always been the cornerstone of Ottoman philosophies of governance, with a monolithic identity defined by abstract lines drawn on an abstract map and institutionalized in an abstract constitution for which an abstract citizenry was willing to spill its far from abstract blood in war.²⁴

It is important, therefore, when reading the biographies that follow to remember this fluid to non-existent distinction between the foreign and the not-foreign, the interior and the exterior, that remained typical of Ottoman political, legal, religious, and ethnic belonging well into the twentieth century. The reason for this is that the temptation for readers will be to imagine the world that these twenty-five women knew as a world defined by the binaries familiar to today’s increasingly contested rhetoric of national belonging—Ottoman or not-Ottoman, European or not-European, oppressors or victims, even modern or not-modern. But it’s best to resist that temptation. The women who inhabit this book came from wildly varied backgrounds and lived fiercely different lives. They had nothing, however, to do with today’s language of pluralism, equity, or equality. Inclusion and exclusion, as they are now defined, would have meant very little to them.

The Problem of “Ottoman Women”

The field of Ottoman history has never lacked innovative, rigorous secondary scholarship devoted to women in imperial life.²⁵ Nor has it fallen short in theoretical studies that take gender as a category of analysis. Every year sees new books and articles published on the famous or infamous women who lived as queens and consorts,²⁶ as patrons of art and architecture,²⁷ or as influential political figures in their own right.²⁸ Several inquiries into the ordinary women populating Ottoman archival documents in the form of plaintiffs or defendants in lawsuits,²⁹ as business owners,³⁰ as contributors to charitable foundations,³¹ or as midwives and doctors³² have rounded out this portrait of women in the Ottoman world. More recently, there has also been a surge of remarkable writing on the women who were themselves artists and poets, in addition to being patrons of these creative pursuits.³³

Although this scholarly interest in women in the Ottoman Empire is open to criticism, descendent as it is of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalist fascination with The Eastern Woman,³⁴ its persistence over more than two centuries makes it difficult to argue that women have been marginalized or invisible in the field as they have been in other fields of history. Students of women’s history in the Ottoman Empire can draw on 250 years of, once again, occasionally dubious secondary writing on women, gender, and sexuality in Ottoman domains that includes everything from Gustave Flaubert’s nineteenth-century description of “Kuchuk Hanem”³⁵ to twentieth-century postcolonial work on intersectional gender, race, and class,³⁶ to more recent, critical scholarship that draws on, and extends, both.³⁷ This is in addition to a wealth of archival and primary source material that is directly and indirectly relevant to women, and that stretches back to the sixteenth and even the fifteenth centuries.³⁸

The catalyst driving this biographical compendium, therefore, is not a sudden recognition that women have been missing from the historical record, waiting for the moment at which their introduction to the canon will disorder pre-existing patriarchal assumptions. No. Such a recognition would run too blatantly contrary to the sea of material we’ve always had at hand. We may

not like this material, but in the field of Ottoman history, women have always been front and center, perhaps too much so.

Thus, the biographies presented here are motivated by a different impetus. Rather than seeking models of influence or power who might operate in their own right alongside their equally influential or powerful male counterparts, the stories told over the following pages will instead explore and interrogate the contingent quality of women's agency, empowerment, and identity as it has played out across the myriad sources that constitute the Ottoman historical record. The women who play roles in the ensuing chapters, that is to say, will emerge as empowered agents only to the extent that they also inhabit a shifting and expansive reservoir of materials and documents that remains dynamic and, itself, open to question. These are not tales of commendable or remarkable or infamous behavior. Instead, they are tales of the always doubtful relationship between, on the one hand, agency, and on the other hand, the source material from which historians excavate stories of that agency.

What do we mean by "agency?" Historically, agency has been defined in feminist political theory as a series of relationships between a subject, broadly construed, and the linguistic or material environments within which that subject operates.³⁹ In the early days, scholars drew on liberal philosophies of the empowered individual to argue that agency referred to a sovereign, independent subject acting upon passive fields of speech, language, or matter.⁴⁰ To the extent that a woman had agency, she spoke for herself, and in so speaking defined herself as a rational, self-conscious, embodied individual, thereby exercising her will upon an inert material or linguistic field. This theory of agency, empowerment, and identity dominated writing in women's history and politics throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, though it also continues to influence popular theories of women's empowerment today.

A second theory of women's agency, prominent by the 1990s, criticized this previous valorization of autonomy and radical individualism for its assumption that power, embodiment, or selfhood *can* operate outside of discourse. It questioned the notion that it's possible, or even desirable, to operate beyond power or to

exert one's will on or against it.⁴¹ This second theory redefined agency, therefore, as a product of language and the environment.⁴² To the extent that a woman exercised agency, she did so within pre-existing discursive or material fields by reenacting likewise pre-existing norms in spontaneous or unexpected ways. Resisting rather than opposing violence, the empowered woman either ironically reproduced violent discourses or unintentionally subverted them.⁴³ Here, then, the definition of language was expanded to include unconscious habitual actions or established scripts as well as the rational speech of the self-conscious individual actor.

A third theory of agency, gaining ground as of the early 2010s, criticized this second theory both for its privileging of language over matter and for its retention, despite itself, of the still largely discrete individual subject, relational though this subject might be.⁴⁴ This third theory, drawing on the environmentalist and post-humanist writing of the early 2000s that took assemblages of matter, rather than the human subject, as its starting point, defined agency as a process by which both human and non-human potential is realized via the interaction of material and linguistic systems.⁴⁵ According to this theory, a woman would exercise agency to the extent that she participated in the unpredictable interactions of material, environmental, and linguistic forces that spontaneously produced pathways toward action or activity.⁴⁶ Whereas the first theory of agency emphasized rights and choice as the defining attributes of the empowered woman, and the second emphasized resistance and subversion as her key qualities, this third theory emphasized vitality and joy.

There are, of course, many more definitions of the term, but these three are schematically helpful because they range across the spectrum of writing on agency and empowerment, from radical individualism to radical environmentalism. All three, along with others that operate in the interstices of the spectrum, will appear throughout the following pages, often overlapping, sometimes competing, but necessarily, as noted before, contingent. Narratives of agency have always been dependent upon source material, and, as the stories that follow will show, reading and interpreting source material is always a haphazard activity.

This raises our second problem: source material. Consider, first of all, the sheer wealth of *stuff* available to historians of the Ottoman Empire. Hundreds of thousands of legal and bureaucratic documents stored both centrally, in Istanbul, and in provincial archives scattered across Europe, Asia, and Africa. Centuries of travelers' accounts in several languages. Journals, novels, letters, scientific studies, poetry, calligraphy, epigraphy, monumental building projects—the list is extensive. And certain types of sources lend, or appear to lend, themselves to certain assumptions regarding women's agency.

In the old days, sources that demonstrated individual self-conscious women speaking rationally for themselves represented the pinnacle of feminist historical work. Letters and journals were best, but the modern novel, too, suggested, at least, an autonomous self-consciousness that hinted at a nascent and properly empowered liberal individual. The notion that self-fashioning via activities such as journal writing is dissociative, and thus as mediated as any other sort of writing, for the most part didn't play a part in this scholarship. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's epistolary production (Chapter 11) and Fatma Aliye's novels (Chapter 17) would have been examples of such self-fashioning. Mihri Hatun's poetry (Chapter 2) and Dilhayat Kalfa's musical compositions (Chapter 12) would have been similarly, if marginally, acceptable.

As time passed, however, and as new theories of agency less enamored of the rational, autonomous individual took hold, the problem of source material that wasn't directly or explicitly produced by women, the material in which women failed to speak for themselves or were mediated through male writers or scribes, became less of a problem. Court cases—transcripts of lawsuits, criminal trials, marital disputes, and the like—became increasingly fashionable as sources because, though the women inhabiting them certainly weren't speaking, unmediated, on their own, the echo of their agency across well-established discourses such as law or commerce allowed for an excavation of evidence of their empowerment. Similarly, the architectural patronage of wealthy women became a popular site for historical research because, though the words of these women were sparse to nonexistent, their physical intervention into an urban landscape was a clear

example of both agency and the subversion of pre-existing norms concerning public and private space. Şakire Hatun's lawsuit (Chapter 8) and Gülnuş Sultan's building projects (Chapter 10) are each examples of this sort of agency deriving from that sort of source material.

And finally, there are the apocryphal women—the women like Malhun Hatun (Chapter 1), who was most likely a composite of more than one historical figure, or Laskarina Bouboulina (Chapter 13), whose legacy is so hyperbolically heroic that she may as well have been fictional. The source material concerning these women is far from rational or trustworthy. Malhun Hatun may not even have had a single body. But if we read this material within the framework of posthumanist theories of agency, if we read, for example, Malhun Hatun as an assemblage rather than as an individual, we can unearth a robust if partial narrative of agency or empowerment in the same way that we can from the novels, letters, journals, buildings, or court cases. The point, once more, is this: there is no need to adhere to only one definition of agency. Despite the discomfort, forcing multiple theories into conversation with one another will produce a more effective portrait of the women who shaped the Empire, of their lives, their relations, and their identities.

And what about their identities? First, and most important, today's identity categories, would have had little resonance in the periods and places with which these biographies concern themselves. Prior to the nineteenth century, few of the women who appear here would have recognized "Turk" or "Arab" as an abstract ethnic categorization rather than as a claim to a more complicated and shifting set of literary or civilizational qualifications.⁴⁷ Adherence to a uniform, centrally standardized linguistic group was non-existent. And even religious identity was fluid, locally situated, and thus heterodox. In the same way that agency in these biographies is contingent both on the source material and, more so, on our reading or interpretation of this material, so too is identity. There were no clear-cut ethno-nationalist distinctions among peoples and populations in the Ottoman Empire until modern census-taking became the norm.

But second, and similarly relevant, remember that the term “Ottoman” itself as a category of belonging was invented by mid-nineteenth-century ideologues out to elaborate a new theory of liberal democratic belonging against the *millet* system, to counteract what had *become* growing ethno-linguistic nationalist movements.⁴⁸ Before that time, “Ottoman” referred to the dynasty or, at best, to the chancery language,⁴⁹ meaning that the term “Ottoman women” would have had as little resonance to most of the figures populating this collection as, for example, “Romanov women” or “Hapsburg women.” And even after the term’s reinvention as a category of citizenship, only the self-consciously modern women who occupied themselves with writing likewise self-consciously modern novels or letters (Fatma Aliye, for example) would have employed it in such a way, and even then with lukewarmth.⁵⁰

It is for this reason that, in addition to women who lived their lives within the borders of the Empire, readers will also find in this compendium biographies of northern and western European women who travelled across these borders and left them behind. The lives of these travelers throw into relief the dialectical quality of historically anachronistic terms like “Ottoman women” by highlighting, sometimes starkly, the extent to which empowerment never happens in a vacuum. The Orientalist agency appropriated by northern or western European women travelers—their performance of their empowerment against the backdrop of a picturesque or degraded East—is a classic example of this process and, as unpleasant as it may be to read about it, their lives were as vital to the shaping of the Ottoman Empire as the lives of more intuitively obvious “Ottoman” women were.

And so, these travelers appear in the volume alongside the ordinary “Ottoman” women and the celebrated “Ottoman” women, the women who failed, despite their best efforts, and the women who succeeded, the suicides and the spies, as well as the queens and the poets, as a means of constituting a miscellany of biographies that, above all, avoid the pitfalls of hagiography. This book is not a study in female exceptionalism. Rather, it is a multifaceted tale of how women’s industry, of how women’s tragedies as well as their triumphs, shaped a global polity not despite, but because of, gender.

Overview

Given its pointillist scope, this collection can be read either consecutively, from cover to cover, or impressionistically, each section or chapter standing alone. Although the volume is arranged chronologically, therefore, chronology is not its primary organizing principle. Rather, each chapter explores one of four classic problems in the study of women's history—borders, spaces, speech, and embodiment—and each biography discusses, implicitly as well as explicitly, (a) how this problem manifested itself in the life history of the biographical subject, and (b) how this subject responded to it as she shaped and interpreted the Empire. Every one of these four problems has also, however, generated nearly as much scholarship in the field of women's history as agency and identity have.

What do we mean, first, by “borders?” Many decades ago, anthropologists posited what has now become a standard distinction in humanistic and social-scientific study between the border, on the one hand, and the boundary, on the other. The border, according to this traditional anthropological work, has to do with sovereignty. It is the imaginary cartographic line surrounding a state, usually a nation state.⁵¹ The boundary, contrarily, has to do with identity. It is the likewise imaginary symbolic line dividing social or cultural groups.⁵² This distinction, like all scholarly distinctions, has been contested. But it is nonetheless a useful starting point for analysis.

One of the more destructive aspects of post-Westphalian⁵³ systems of international law, for example, has been the impetus these systems have given to often doomed efforts to superimpose political borders onto cultural boundaries, frequently in the form of walls or wire.⁵⁴ Moreover, the rhetoric of equality, democracy or freedom that often accompanies these endeavors has only exacerbated the bloody futility of such moments. Indeed, in their most extreme manifestations, these moments have led to the population exchanges, ethnic cleansings, and genocides familiar to students of nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century history.⁵⁵

Our interest in this compendium, however, is less the dysfunctional relationship between the political border and the cultural

boundary, and more how, in the midst of this empty shoring up of boundaries as borders and the other way around, women's bodies became one of the most exaggerated sites of the collision between the two—how women's bodily borders, sovereign borders, and cultural or national boundaries have all become mixed up in the popular, political, legal, cultural, and even artistic imagination as interchangeable lines or spaces. As a corollary, we will also ask how women negotiated or subverted these ongoing collisions. For as much as the Westphalian moment operated across women's bodies on a global scale, it was also challenged or undermined in these spaces. And, prior to the modern period, boundaries—religious, metaphysical, and rhetorical as well as cultural or ethnic—far more than borders determined the shape of polities like the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁶

The questions underlying the biographies that address women shaping borders, therefore, are, first, how did this simultaneity of women's bodily borders or boundaries with political or cultural borders or boundaries affect the daily life of early modern and modern women? Second, what sort of agency did women exercise when borders and boundaries shaped, or were shaped by, not only territory and culture, but also dreamscapes, religious experiences, or artistic expression? Third, how did women live their lives both on borders and *as* borders. And finally, fourth, how did women's lives in turn shape the borders themselves?

The second classic problem in the study of women's history invoked in the following chapters—space—is related to the problem of borders. Indeed, a traditional question animating much of the earliest work in women's history was how public and private space might be distinguished from one another, or where to draw the border or boundary between the two.⁵⁷ This question, in turn, prompted an ever-growing series of associated questions: how have women navigated public and private space? Can we speak of the interpenetration of the public and the private? To what extent were women's bodies inscribed within or superimposed upon private or public space? How was private or domestic space, such as the harem, nonetheless political? How and for what purpose did women reshape notions of the public and the private?⁵⁸

This distinction between the public and the private is, however, only one of several means of thinking about the shape of space. An influential twentieth-century French work on the production of space broadly defined, for example, divided public space itself into, among other categories, the abstract space of the urban square idealized in mass democratic politics, the horizontal space of institutions such as schools or prisons that symbolizes submission to authority, the vertical space of the monument or skyscraper, which reproduces power, the subterranean space of the cemetery, which expresses death, and the strategic space of the suburb, which—in large western European cities such as Paris, at least—forces troublesome groups toward the periphery, away from centers of decision and information.⁵⁹

But even these more detailed theories of space frequently take the city, or more narrowly the western European city, as their model. As a result, such theories both ignore the horizontal, rather than vertical, quality of traditional Ottoman architectural planning, while also encouraging an Orientalist fascination with the supposedly inaccessible harem unique to upper-class city-dwellers.⁶⁰ More than that, this urban emphasis also discounts the shape of space in villages or agricultural areas, the shape of space on the battlefield, or, for that matter, the shape of space in the imagined realm of the prophesied global empire.⁶¹

And yet, all of these spaces were as essential to the lives of the women who appear in this compendium as cities such as Istanbul or Salonica. Indeed, women shaped and navigated imagined or rhetorical space as effectively as they did public, private, or for that matter urban horizontal or vertical space. Hence, the concern of these biographies is not just the shape of space, but the shape and shaping of *spaces* across the Empire.

Words, speech, and language play much the same role as borders and space in traditional studies of women's history. Classic feminist work on the history of women and words, for example, often starts with the methodological difficulty inherent in researching private women's speech when it has so frequently been mediated by public men and male-dominated genres or institutions.⁶² This problem is central to the biographies that make up this collection as well. Most of the women who appear in these

pages do so two, three, or four degrees removed. They are described and given speech by men. The most immediate question that a feminist scholar might ask of these tales, therefore, is how might we excavate women's words when these words have been refashioned by others, frequently into something unrecognizable, across time, space, gender, and often genre?⁶³

But this traditional question is not the only question facing historians of women, speech, and language. A second question, and more to the point for our purposes, might be: ought excavating the lost words of silent women even be the task of the biographer or the historian? After all, in the same way that uncritically reading certain sources—letters, journals, and novels—as evidence of authoritative women speaking for and about themselves led earlier women's historians to draw occasionally dubious conclusions, so too has the associated search for women's ever elusive unmediated speech led to equally dubious methods and modes of analysis.

Why? First, because speech, no matter how spontaneous or immediate, is always mediated by time, space, genre, and interpretation.⁶⁴ And second, more important, because one of the assumptions underlying the notion that mediation itself is disempowering is the related notion that speech has one purpose, which is representation, and usually political representation. So long as the speaking woman, historical or otherwise, represents herself effectively, the argument goes, that woman is exercising agency.⁶⁵

As early as the 1980s, however, this interpretation of speech, or of past speech recuperated, became a question, rather than a given, in feminist writing on historical representation.⁶⁶ Though historians might represent the echoes of historical speaking subjects, this writing posited, the goal of these historians could never be accuracy, which is an impossibility, so much as a transformation of the historian's own narrative consciousness.⁶⁷ Yes, the purpose of speech could very well be, or have been, representation or even communication. But it might also be, or have been, poetry, prayer, or ritual. It might have been babble even, or silence.⁶⁸ It is thus questionable that one or the other sort of source can return a biographical speaking subject from the dead in all of her unmediated glory. What we as historians conjure up instead, according to this second trend in the literature, is an echo, a flicker of a

moment of a life, and what we may or may not achieve via this act of conjuration is a shift in our *own* consciousness. We reanimate them. But the dead are still dead.

In addition to exploring the problem of women's speech as it is mediated by male-dominated institutions, therefore, a key question motivating these biographies is the more fundamental relationship among gendered language, speech, words, and writing. These are not identical or unproblematic activities, and the tensions and collisions among them can be both productive and disorienting. Our interest, therefore, will be less discovering and recuperating what women said, or meant to say, and more creating a context in which their words might shape our own historical consciousness.

Finally, women's bodies as vessels of individual or collective life and death, modern as well as pre-modern, have figured in women's history since the initiation of the field.⁶⁹ The patriarchal claim that reproduction is the central function of the female body, and the associated patriarchal fear of the bare, biological life or death, absent politics, that this body represents, have together produced regimes of sexual oppression and violence that need hardly be enumerated or repeated.⁷⁰ How women have responded to, appropriated, or for that matter, ignored, these well-established tropes is thus worth exploring further.

As we shall see, the women who appear over the following pages experienced their embodiment, their relationship to life as well as to death, in disparate and idiosyncratic ways. Some embraced monstrous life and the monstrous body, giving themselves over to a variation on reproduction that exploded efforts to contain the biological qualities of female embodiment. Others set themselves up as guardians or protectors, rather than producers, of life. And still others dissolved their discrete, singular, embodied reproductive lives across material and environmental spaces. Some defined life as love while others defined life as art, and yet others defined it as an object of consumer desire.

Likewise, the *femme fatales* and the suicides, the murderers and the martyrs, the vampires and the hags who have embodied

death and decay in modern and pre-modern political and cultural rhetoric for as long as they've been saddled with responsibility for collective reproduction have their Ottoman counterparts as well. Representing the dark side of liberal choice in the modern period, these women frequently emerge as tragic figures who, despite themselves, often despite their best intentions, choose death. By the early twentieth century, indeed, the well-worn tale of the seductive spy, the despairing suicide, the despotic warrior woman, or all three together had cemented this equation between women's choice and women's death within a now mass-produced popular consciousness.

But was there a variation on this theme of deadly embodiment that was *peculiarly* Ottoman or that pre-dated the eighteenth-century birth of the liberal political subject and her radically individual choice? The chapters that follow will suggest that there very much was. A running theme throughout the following pages is that such women not only inhabited the Ottoman Empire as unique representatives of embodied death, but also, to come full circle, shaped its borders, its spaces, its speech, and, finite though it may have been, its life.

The biographies that constitute this compendium are thus, above all, a miscellany, a collection of fragments of the lives and deaths of some, but not all, or even most, of the women who shaped the Ottoman Empire. Incomplete and fractured, these narratives dwell for longer than might seem necessary on small moments, episodes, or objects in or from the lives of the women they've momentarily called back from the dead. But make no mistake: these moments, episodes, and objects are as evocative in their trivial, accidental persistence across time as the most deliberately hallowed or hulking of monuments and palaces. The apple consumed by a fourteenth-century Anatolian peasant or the teacup purchased by an eighteenth-century Istanbul composer are as vital to the shaping of the Ottoman polity as any post-war territorial concession, quasi-constitutional tax treaty, or tribute to imperial might. In many ways, they are more so. Or, at least, so goes the claim underlying this book.

Notes

- 1 Einer Wigen, "Ottoman Concepts of Empire," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8 (1) (Summer 2013): 44–66, 54. See also Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in The Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 22.
- 2 Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extra-territoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40–41.
- 3 Einer Wigen, "Ottoman Concepts of Empire," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8 (1) (Summer 2013), 54. For example, the *milket-i Osman*, the "gifts of Osman," as elaborated in Chapter 1.
- 4 Douglas Howland, "The Foreign and the Sovereign: Extra-territoriality in East Asia," in Douglas Howland and Luise White, eds., *The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008): 35–55, 50. See also Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 5 Linda Darling, "Contested Territory: Ottoman Holy War in Comparative Context," *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 133–163, 135.
- 6 Aptullah Kuran, "A Spatial Study of Three Ottoman Capitals: Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 114–131, 114.
- 7 Aptullah Kuran, "A Spatial Study of Three Ottoman Capitals: Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996), 120.
- 8 Murat Cem Mengüç, "Histories of Bayezid I, Historians of Bayezid II: Rethinking Late Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Historiography," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 76 (3) (2013): 373–389, 382.
- 9 Karen Pinto, "The Maps Are the Message: Mehmet II's Patronage of an 'Ottoman Cluster,'" *Imago Mundi* 63 (2) (2011): 155–179, 157.
- 10 Kaan Üçsu, "Cartographies of the 'Eastern Question': Some Considerations on Mapping the Sea of the Marmara and the Black Sea in the Nineteenth Century," in Concha Roldán, Daniel Brauer, and Johannes Rohbeck, eds., *Philosophy of Globalization* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2018): 253–268, 254.
- 11 Einer Wigen, "Ottoman Concepts of Empire," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8 (1) (Summer 2013), 49.
- 12 Lâle Uluç, "Selling to the Court: Late-Sixteenth-Century Manuscript Production in Shiraz," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 73–96, 89.

- 13 Anders Ingram, "The Ottoman Siege of Vienna, English Bal-lads, and the Exclusion Crisis," *The Historical Journal* 57 (1) (March 2014): 53–80, 54.
- 14 Alexis Heraclides and Ada Dialla, *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 134.
- 15 James E. Kitchen, "Violence in Defense of Empire: The British Army and the 1919 Egyptian Revolution," *Journal of Modern European History* 13 (2) (2015): 249–267, 258.
- 16 Mahmoud Haddad, "Syria and Iraq as Proxy Colonies Before Colonization: The Ottoman Vali Versus the Western Consul in the Era of Capitulations," *Die Welt des Islams* 60 (1) (2020): 3–30, 29.
- 17 Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 2.
- 18 H.T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society between Europe and the Arab World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 4–5, 264–265. Galip Çağ, "From Myth to Reality: Some Findings on the Role of Islam in the Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans," in Ayşe Zişan Furat and Hamit Er, eds., *Balkans and Islam: Encounter, Transformation, Discontinuity, Continuity* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012): 8–19, 15–16.
- 19 Najwa Al-Qattan, "Dhimmi in the Muslim Court: Legal Autonomy and Religious Discrimination," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (3) (August 1999): 429–444, 444.
- 20 Fariba Zarinebaf, "Intercommunal Life in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century," *Review of Middle East Studies* 46 (1) (Summer 2021): 79–85, 79.
- 21 And even the theory was more complicated than it ordinarily appears in conventional histories of the Ottoman Empire that seek a "simplification of a relentlessly complex pile of historical facts into a manageable schema." Şunhaz Yilmaz and İpek Yosmaoğlu, "Fighting the Spectres of the Past: Dilemmas of Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans and the Middle East," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44 (5) (September 2008): 677–693, 682.
- 22 "The *millet* system was not a codified system, and its implementation was not comparable across communities. Eighteen different legal systems have been described under the Ottoman *millet* practice, as was necessary in such a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society." Latif Tas, "The Myth of the Ottoman 'Millet' System: Its Treatment of Kuds and a Discussion of Territorial and Non-Territorial Autonomy," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 21 (4) (2014): 497–526, 507.

- 23 For example, “although the state officials emphasized the logic of distinguishing between religious and nonreligious (or political) in order to reconcile non-Muslim particularism with universal citizenship, the line between them was left flexible.” Masayuki Ueno, “Religious in Form, Political in Content? Privileges of Ottoman Non-Muslims in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59 (3) (2016): 408–441, 434.
- 24 Universal military conscription as an adjunct to universal citizenship remained an ongoing problem for Ottoman political theory throughout the nineteenth century. See, for example, Mehmet Hacısalıhoğlu, “Inclusion and Exclusion: Conscription in the Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Modern European History* 5 (2) (2007): 264–286.
- 25 Recently, for example, Suraiya Faroqhi, *Women in the Ottoman Empire: A Social and Political History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2023).
- 26 Leslie Peirce, *Empress of the East: How a European Slave Girl Became Queen of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).
- 27 Muzaffer Özgüleş, *The Women Who Built the Ottoman World: Female Patronage and the Architectural Legacy of Gülnuş Sultan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).
- 28 Didem Havlıoğlu, “The Writing Subjects: Halide Edip and Assia Djebar,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 12 (2) (July 2016): 291–295.
- 29 Canonically, Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also, among many others, Liat Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women: Sex, Law, and Medicine in Khedival Egypt* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011).
- 30 Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, “The Role of Women in the Urban Economy of Istanbul, 1700–1850,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 60 (Fall 2001): 141–152, 142.
- 31 Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012).
- 32 Gülhan Balsoy, *The Politics of Reproduction in Ottoman Society, 1838–1900* (New York: Routledge, 2013) and Tuba Demirci and Selçuk Akşin Somel, “Women’s Bodies, Demography, and Public Health: Abortion Policy and Perspectives in the Ottoman Empire of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17 (3) (September 2008): 377–420.

- See also Khaled Fahmy, "Women, Medicine, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," in Lila Abu Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 35–72.
- 33 Didem Havlioğlu, *Mihri Hatun: Performance, Gender-Bending, and Subversion in Ottoman Intellectual History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2017).
 - 34 Nikki R. Keddie, "Women in the Limelight: Some Recent Books on Middle Eastern Women's History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (3) (August 2002): 553–573, 555.
 - 35 Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1991), 75.
 - 36 Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996).
 - 37 Başak Tuğ, "Gender and Ottoman Social History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2) (May 2014): 379–381.
 - 38 Madeline Zilfi, ed., *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 49.
 - 39 Laura M. Ahearn, "Language and Agency," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 109–137, 112–113.
 - 40 Frequently inspired by the philosophy of John Stuart Mill via, for example, Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 118.
 - 41 "In this sense, a [speech] 'act' is not a momentary happening, but a certain nexus of temporal horizons, the condensation of an iterability that exceeds the moment it occasions." Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 14.
 - 42 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 14.
 - 43 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 14.
 - 44 For example, Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
 - 45 N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1.
 - 46 N. Katherine Hayles, "Limiting Metaphors and Enabling Constraints in Dawkins and Deleuze/Guattari," *SubStance* 30 (1/2) (2001): 144–159, 158.

- 47 Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). See also F. Aslı Ergul, “The Ottoman Identity: Turkish, Muslim or Rum?” *Middle Eastern Studies* 48 (4) (July 2012): 629–645, 630.
- 48 Virginia H. Aksan, “Ottoman to Turk: Continuity and Change,” *International Journal* 61 (1) (Winter 2005/2006): 19–38, 23.
- 49 F. Aslı Ergul, “The Ottoman Identity: Turkish, Muslim or Rum?” *Middle Eastern Studies* 48 (4) (July 2012), 631, 642.
- 50 Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Sultan and the Bureaucracy: The Anti-Tanzimat Concepts of Grand Vizier Mahmud Nedim Paşa,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22 (3) (August 1990): 257–274, 258.
- 51 Didier Fassin, “Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 213–226, 214.
- 52 Didier Fassin, “Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011), 214.
- 53 Like Turan Kayaoğlu, I am maintaining this usage of the term, while nonetheless recognizing its insufficiency. Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27.
- 54 Didier Fassin, “Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011), 216.
- 55 Aida A. Hozic, “The Paradox of Sovereignty in the Balkans,” in Howland and White, eds., 243–260, 245.
- 56 Kathryn A. Ebel, “Representations of the Frontier in Ottoman Town Views of the Sixteenth Century,” *Imago Mundi* 60 (1) (2008): 1–22, 6.
- 57 Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, “Rethinking Public and Private Space: Religion and Women in Muslim Society,” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 18 (4) (Winter, 2001): 302–324. See also Daphne Spain, “Gender and Urban Space,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014): 581–598. And many more.
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